

Michigan Department of Corrections

Education Action Plan – Phase II

“Expecting Excellence Every Day”



October 1, 2002 – September 30, 2003

Introduction

The Department of Corrections developed and implemented its first strategic plan for prisoner education programs in May of 1995. The original Education Action Plan continues with the evolution of Phase II, a cost-effective delivery of educational programming, utilizing the original plan as the foundation.

Education Action Plan - Phase II recognizes the impact of Public Act 320 of 1998 which requires prisoners to obtain a GED, if they are capable, prior to release. The Department's commitment to this legislation is further demonstrated through Policy Directive 05.02.112, "Education Programs for Prisoners". The policy ensures accountability and provides dynamic leadership for continually improving educational strategy.

During the implementation of Phase II, the Department will continue strategies gleaned from expert input, such as the Michigan State University Study of Vocational Programs in the Michigan Department of Corrections and the working sessions of the Department's Education Steering Committee.

Mission

The mission of the education programs is to provide educational opportunities for prisoners in taking responsibility for developing their academic, work and social competencies to assist them in becoming contributing, positive members of the prison community while incarcerated and productive members of their communities upon release from prison.

Vision for Educational Programs

The vision for the future includes the development of a comprehensive prisoner intake process. This will include the assessment and verification of the incoming prisoner's academic achievements. In addition, an individual plan for each prisoner entering the Department will be developed. This plan will include a vocational assessment and an evaluation that will assist the prisoner to overcome barriers in maintaining employment upon release.

Programming will be outlined with attention to length of sentence, security level, and health care needs. Following the reception/intake process, the prisoner will be transferred, depending upon Department bed space needs, to the appropriate prison based on the needs identified in his/her plan.

Educational programs will be provided in a new approach that will have facilities specialize in an educational product. GED completion will be the primary focus at 34 facilities and five camps. Career and Technical (vocational) completion will be the focal point at eleven facilities. The facility wardens have the authority and will be held responsible for implementing strategies for their facilities' education programs.

This new approach will allow the Department to concentrate resources and provide a quality education program with a more effective and efficient use of educational dollars. The student capacity of the centers identified in this document was established by totaling the number of prisoners requiring a GED or Career and Technical certificate and implementing standard ratios of prisoner to FTEs. The recommended ratio is 60:1 for academic and 30:1 for Career and Technical programs.

The projected enrollment capacity accommodates all prisoners currently enrolled and on waiting lists. As this new approach takes hold and the schools' productivity increases, the number of academic centers required may be reduced as prisoners obtain their GED certificate earlier in their incarceration. Once the demand for GED certification has decreased, the Department will focus on enhancing and expanding the Career and Technical Education programs.

The Department has a history of working toward a seamless curriculum to maintain students on track. In the past, the Department has used the progress plotter to reflect the core curriculum. The Department will continue to use appropriate educational technology. This will enable a prisoner to continue studies at his/her current skill level while working without interruption toward GED completion or Career and Technical certification. This seamless curriculum will be continuously delivered from one Department school to the next.

The use of technology provides a unique management capability. Every prisoner will be required to enter the educational curriculum using the same software. The software allows the electronic transfer of all the information that educators require on an individual prisoner.

The Offender Education Tracking System will be available throughout the Department. It will assist in moving to a single educational system rather than separate autonomous schools. This system is expected to be implemented in 2002 in conjunction with other educational enhancements. Each enhancement is part of an educational improvement strategy under the direction of the Education Steering Committee. Starting at the intake process, all prisoners will be entered in the Offender Education Tracking System. This will record their programming involvement and track their educational progress and

program completion(s). The information will be used to assist them in creating a portfolio for employment upon release.

The Education Steering Committee recognizes that continued testing for achievement is required. The Department will continue to employ the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and TABE-PC, as well as review new products through input by curriculum committees.

The technology and curriculum reviewing process will continue as new technologies and resources become available. The results of all testing will be recorded electronically and the data will be available for reference by appropriate Department staff. Testing information demonstrates program validity and cost effectiveness. An assessment plan will be developed to measure the prisoner's success upon release.

Scheduling to maximize educational opportunities for prisoners will increase as the various centers reflect their missions and goals. The prison environment offers great flexibility for scheduling classes. With the continued 32 teacher-student contact hours schedule and prisoner to teacher ratios, the Department will effectively take advantage of the 24 hour, 7 day a week environment of correctional facilities. Incorporated in the academic and Career and Technical Education Center approach is the incentive for prisoners to earn a transfer through completion of individual educational program plans.

Most prisoners will start their sentence in the Region I and earn additional educational opportunities and placement at Region II and Region III facilities as they complete their programming requirements and earn additional educational opportunities outlined during the intake process in their individualized plans.

The new approach will continue a regular audit process and measure use of resources, productivity, and compliance with policy. The audit will be the guiding document for improvement and meeting the standards as outlined in this new approach to educational programs.

Educational Programs

The Michigan Department of Corrections offers the following programs:

- 1) Academic - Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED preparation (GED), and English Literacy (ESL)
- 2) Special Education (SPE) (under federal guidelines for Special Education)
- 3) Career and Technical Education (CTE) (formerly called vocational education)
- 4) Pre-Release Skills (PRS) (including job seeking skills, social skills and life skills)

Academic

The Department's first priority for resource allocation will be to assist each prisoner in obtaining a General Education Development (GED) certificate and to assist the prisoner in obtaining Career and Technical training before he/she is released to the community. This plan establishes the minimum educational functioning level as attainment of the GED certificate, with accommodation for the needs of prisoners with disabilities and exemptions as provided by Public Act 320.

The established academic centers will provide educational programming in a flexible schedule that includes evening and weekend classes where classroom space and staffing are available. Recommended scheduling is class periods that are two hours long with a minimum of fifteen prisoners, reflecting a 60:1 ratio based on students to total FTEs. This will be an audit element and reviewed over the next year. At the academic centers, ABE and GED students shall be combined. Special accommodations will be provided for non-readers. All prisoners without a GED or diploma will have a common goal of working toward the completion of their GED. English Literacy (ESL) classes will be available at designated centers for those prisoners struggling with language barriers, including those who do not speak or read fluent English.

The incentive program established by the Education Action Plan of 1995, and reflected in policy, will continue:

- 1) A prisoner otherwise eligible for camp placement or community supervision will not be eligible unless he/she has attained or is successfully progressing toward attainment of the GED certificate, with the exception of those prisoners excluded by Public Act 320 of 1998, who are not eligible for parole without attainment of the GED or exempted as directed by law;
- 2) If a prisoner refuses to participate, he/she is subject to all appropriate sanctions provided by policy and law including loss of disciplinary credits; and
- 3) A prisoner must successfully complete the minimum education course before the prisoner may be assigned to the more prestigious or higher sought after institution and prison industry jobs.

As part of a consistent effort to assist all prisoners who are capable of attaining a GED certificate, prisoners who do not qualify for special education services and who exhibit potential learning disabilities, shall be tested by a school psychologist where appropriate. This testing will determine a prisoner's eligibility for GED accommodations, such as extended time, scribe, calculator, etc. Another option may involve a review of the prisoner's health records to determine whether he/she may qualify for GED accommodations due to mental or physical health issues.

Prisoners who have not completed a GED prior to parole consideration, may be considered for an exemption under the "no fault of their own" provision per PD 05.02-112, Paragraph No. 7, if the following minimum criteria are met:

- 1) Regular school attendance at every opportunity until released.
- 2) Consistent, satisfactory school progress evaluations.
- 3) Recommendation of school principal and approval of warden.
- 4) Continued participation in GED/high school completion classes as a condition of parole.

Special Education

Special Education Programming shall continue in accordance with the MDOC Special Education Plan. Special Education Centers, as listed in policy directive 05.02.114, shall continue.

Career and Technical Education

In 1998, Michigan State University's Criminal Justice Department conducted an assessment of vocational (CTE) education programs in the Michigan Department of Corrections. The report included recommended areas of improvement. These

suggestions were incorporated in the restructuring of vocational (CTE) programs in the Department.

This new approach begins at the intake process with verification of a prisoner's educational accomplishments and an assessment of vocational aptitude and interest. Each prisoner will have an individual educationally appropriate plan developed which will become part of the computerized Offender Education Tracking System providing information regarding the prisoner's placement. Data gathered during the interest and aptitude assessment process will be considered in future CTE programming decisions.

This new plan identifies Career and Technical centers that will provide prisoners with training in technical skills and workplace competencies. These will include job skills and life skills, which are in demand in the marketplace. This plan is intended to assist the prisoner in taking personal responsibility in order for him/her to become a productive member of the prison community and a contributing member of society upon release.

The Phase II plan establishes specialized Career and Technical schools within facilities throughout the state, taking into consideration various security levels. The number of centers was developed with the creation of an average 30:1 ratio. This will allow the Education Steering Committee to create enough educational slots to account for all prisoners with a prerequisite of an agency verified GED or high school diploma who have been identified for Career and Technical Education (CTE). This would include prisoners on waiting lists.

On average, each CTE instructor will teach two, 15 prisoner classes per day. General Technical staff (School Teacher P-11) will teach classes 1, 2, or 3 hours in length depending on institutional need, physical plant limitations, and curriculum requirements. Class size will be determined by guidelines for square footage required for that vocational program, as established by the Michigan Department of Career Development.

This plan requires that all Career and Technical Education centers offer training relevant to institutional assignments and Michigan State Industry employment to ensure prisoners become productive members of the prison community while incarcerated. There is a corresponding expectation that skills learned and practiced while incarcerated will lead to successful employment and promotional opportunities upon release.

All CTE Centers will have common components. However, the technical training component will vary depending on the CTE programs offered at each facility. Components at the centers will include:

- 1) Assessment/Evaluation/Counseling;
- 2) Technical training in various trades areas;
- 3) Computer literacy;
- 4) Applied Skills;
- 5) Technical Math;
- 6) Job related Social Skills;
- 7) Employment search using Michigan Occupational Information System;
- 8) Pre-Release.

The projected number of hours required for an average student to complete a core program for each trade area has been standardized and is printed on each of the approved progress plotters. These standards will be reviewed regularly to meet those in industry. Upon completion of course requirements, a standard CTE certificate will be issued which will include information on skills areas mastered and associated D.O.T. codes.

For those prisoners within three years of their earliest release date, CTE programming will include training for institutional jobs and training for outside employment. Prisoners who have a short time until release will be trained in general workplace skills. These programs will be computer based and arranged in employment focused clusters. There will be an emphasis on these types of programs at Level I facilities.

New program recommendations will take into consideration data gathered from interest and aptitude testing, cost of program start-ups, physical plant, and employment opportunities. Curriculum that can be adjusted to the changing needs of the marketplace will be considered.

The plan includes a recommendation that all CTE students be required to take a course in computer literacy unless they have demonstrated such literacy through previous course work. The course instruction will be delivered separately from the CTE class where appropriate.

Staffing at the CTE Centers will include Civil Service certified staff (Trades Instructor P-11) who are qualified to teach the specific trades areas. These staff may also teach components outside their trades areas if the components are part of a combination assignment. General Technical staff with a valid Michigan Teaching certificate (School Teacher P-11) will provide integrated instructional and evaluation services in testing, technical math, applied skills, computer literacy, employment counseling, job related social skills, and pre-release. Depending on the needs of the institution, they may continue to provide some ABE/GED instructional services.

This plan will continue the mutually beneficial and growing relationship between Career and Technical Education Centers and the MDOC Prison Build Program. It will also examine all areas that can enhance the opportunity for prisoners to gain skills and at the same time provide valuable resources to the community. As part of a continuous review and improvement process, the Department will seek to establish new relationships and strengthen present ties with outside employers to ensure that skills being taught are relevant in today's job markets. Instructors will be encouraged to attend trades specific professional development activities and maintain employer connections which will keep them current in their fields of instruction. In addition, the Department will explore the possibility of partnerships with various employment agencies and/or potential employers who can assist ex-offenders in attaining meaningful employment.

Pre-Release

The overall pre-release program starts with the planning during the intake assessment and progresses through the period of incarceration with the prisoner working toward completion of his/her plan for attainment of a GED and/or career and technical skills.

A standardized pre-release program will offer opportunities to apply skills to real life situations and will consist of a core program which will prepare the prisoner for community re-entry. Additions to the core curriculum are encouraged at the individual facilities. Community resources may be used whenever feasible as a supplement to the program.

To continue to utilize and involve available staff resources, some of the prisons may use non-teaching staff, such as Chaplains, Resident Unit Managers, Assistant Resident Unit Supervisors, and Resident Unit Officers to teach pre-release class components. School principals will be responsible for monitoring and reporting of the pre-release program.

Prisoners will be enrolled in pre-release classes based upon their release date.

Summary

It is essential that all staff in the Department embrace the strategies included in Education Action Plan-Phase II and assist in the implementation. The delivery of education programs must be done in a cost-effective manner. The professional educators who deliver services have the greatest impact on improving the efficiency by which the Department delivers educational programs. Achieving the goals in this action plan will aid in enhanced public safety, but will also be a significant step toward achieving a major educational mission of the Department. The Education Steering Committee, in developing this plan, continues to focus on our obligation to the citizens of Michigan, staff, and the care and custody of prisoners, “Expecting Excellence Every Day”.

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